

**Political History Collection
Interview H.0001.01 : Tape 1**

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Interviewed by: Paljor Tsarong
Name: Drakten [Tib. grags bstan]
Gender: Male
Age: 57
Date of Birth: 1935

Abstract

Drakten [Tib. grags bstan] was a monk official in the traditional Tibetan government who discusses in detail the political events that occurred in Lhasa in the 1950s. In this interview, he discusses the situation that ensued when the main Chinese representative, Zhang Jingwu, came to Tibet and met with the two Sitsab. He talks about the requests the Chinese made and the reactions of the Tibetan officials to Chinese requests such as putting a Chinese flag on the Potala and on the Tibetan military headquarters. Additionally, he discusses aspects of the rise of the Tibetan People's Association in Tibet.

Tape 1

Q: If we talk about a time period, then I would like you to begin in 1951. In 1951, the Dalai Lama was in Yadong. Then from India, Representative Zhang (Jingwu) (Ch. Zhang Dai biao) came and met the Dalai Lama. Then the Dalai Lama went from Yadong to Lhasa and after that, the Chinese soldiers began coming to Lhasa, right?

A: Yes, that's exactly right.

Q: So at that time, Kungö, you were in Lhasa?

A: Yes, I was in Lhasa.

Q: What was the situation like? Had the problems with the Sitsab began? There was also the People's Association. So after the Chinese came, what was the situation like?

A: At first, the Dalai Lama was in Yadong and the 17-Point Agreement was decided upon. By sea, via India, Representative Zhang, the main representative, went to Yadong. At that time, the Dalai Lama was at Yadong Dunggar [Tib. dung dkar] Monastery. Since the Dalai Lama was in the monastery, when the Chinese entered the gate to the courtyard, the Dalai Lama was said to have been watching from the upper level window. Then they went in. Inside he presented a khata to the Dalai Lama and they seemed to have sat down.

Then, the Dalai Lama stayed behind in Yadong and Representative Zhang Jingwu went ahead to Lhasa. When he was in Yadong, Zhang had sent a letter to the two Sitsab asking where the Tibetan government was going to receive him and stating that the two Sitsab must attend. The Chinese Central Committee's representative was arriving on such and such date in Lhasa and the two Sitsab had to come receive him at the first receiving stage. He said that it was in the letter. The two Sitsab immediately inquired about a lot of documents relating to the time when Shatra, Shölkhang, and Changkyim were the Sitsab, and their protocol procedures regarding the Chinese Amban. The document was procured from the Kashag and it stated that when the Amban came, Shashöchangsum (the above mentioned three shape) would meet him at the Tsuglagang in the Tsomchen Nangsi [Tib. tshoms chen snang srid] Hall. That is where they stayed and when the Chinese came, the khata scarves were exchanged in Nangsi Hall. So using this as a base, the government reception group was at Gyetse Luding. Here the katsab, drungtsab, and other officials were gathered, but the two Sitsab did not go.

Then when Representative Zhang came up, he went straight in. When he entered the threshold, the Sitsab lama (the monk Sitsab) gave him a khata and received one in return. Then, Lukhangwa gave a khata and received one in return. Then Zhang shook the Sitsab lama's and Lukhangwa's hands. As he shook the latter's hand, holding it fast and vigorously shaking it, he said, "Wasn't it

very nice? We got Tibet through peaceful liberation between the leaders of the two sides, and there was no blood shed between the brotherly nationalities. Wasn't it excellent?" So without letting go of his hand, he said those things. Lukhangwa did not give any reply except to say, "Yes, yes. First please sit down, first please sit down. Come in and we can speak about these matters later, gradually." Then as they sat around, they had tea, snacks and drama dresi. Then as they relaxed and started speaking, the first thing that was said was to repeat the same thing. That, "Today we won a peaceful liberation of Tibet," and that "It was good to meet and speak with you in a peaceful manner. Wasn't it?" That he asked once again. Then Lukhangwa said, "Regarding these matters I won't speak about them today. There are so many things to say and we will talk with you gradually." That was his only reply. The Sitsab lama had lived in China before and he spoke for a while. So that day, it was quite useless. They did not speak for long, just had tea and the snacks.

Then, the two Sitsab, the Kalön, and the Chinese officials had a meeting in Ewam Hall. Then there was said to be another meeting in Nangsi Hall. In the Nangsi meeting [this occurred some time later], one evening, this happened. What should I say. What the Chinese mainly said was that they wanted to start the Military Administrative Committee in Tibet. The Tibetan Army would be absorbed into the People's Liberation Army. So in the first talk, that's what they were saying. Then Lukhangwa argued that this was not at all possible. Then things could not be finalized. When the Chinese spoke harshly, the Tibetan reply was made calmly, and then another Chinese spoke calmly, too. Even though the manner of their speech was most varied, the replies were always consistent [Tib. mtha' gcig tu] and they didn't change their tone. There were also a lot of exchanges between them and it was getting dark as well. It was also very windy, since it was getting to be winter and it was cold. So while it was very windy, a lot of the People's Liberation Army troops were around: the troops were all over the Barkor, on top of the Tsuglagang, and outside the meeting room. There were many soldiers, and they looked very alarmed and agitated. Just then, the wind blew open the door of the meeting room. The gobshag [Tib. sgo shag], a plank that holds the door closed, fell from the gusty wind. All the Chinese were greatly startled. Lukhangwa said, "It's all right, it's all right. Nothing's happening. It is only that the gobshag fell down, nothing else. Please sit down." Lukhangwa always had a well sharpened Nepalese knife under his the rug on his cushion (seat). He didn't have a gun or anything like that. If there was any danger to his life, he intended to use that. So that was the end of that evening.

Later, in Ewam Hall, there was a meeting. The same earlier Chinese officers were there and the Sitsab and the Kalön were seated on one side. What the Chinese said was that the People's Association meetings were not good at all. The people were rising up and doing all kinds of things. They said that this must be stopped right away, and they also clearly stated that they could not do such things in the future. Through the Kashag they made a lot of requests, and that day, in the presence of the Kashag and Sitsab, they made their demands. To this, Sitsab Lukhangwa said, "Their actions are in accordance with the Tibetan laws and customs of our country. Whatever problems the people are bringing to the attention of the Tibetan government, the government will listen to the problems of the people. Then afterwards, they will see what the government can do regarding their concerns. If there are various matters, then the government will say, 'You have said such and such, that's okay. We will think about that matter.' In this manner we have to make replies. One has to reply and not say that the people are not allowed to speak, or that the people are not allowed to express their problems. That the people have to go. Such things are not in the laws and customs of our country. The people's concerns must be heard with great importance. One has to make a reply. They are not making the request as an opponent nor with puffed shoulders, but with a khata scarf in their hands, and with their cheeks touching the ground in prostration. They are expressing their hardships. So since they are making their petitions in a law-abiding and customary way, the reply must also be within the law and one must speak with them. So how are you going to reply to their points? What replies are you going to give them? That's the way it should be done." The Chinese did not reply to that, and glancing and saying something to one another, they all got up and left saying, "Behind the curtain there are people [Tib. yol ba'i rgyab la mi 'dug] (means that the Sitsab were behind the People's Association)."

Whenever they went to see the Dalai Lama, the two Sitsab would go to the Dalai Lama's room, and the meetings took place where the two Sitsab were. Whatever replies were made were done by the two Sitsab. So since the two Sitsab were being quite tough [Tib. mkhregs po], the Chinese were very dissatisfied about it.

Then one day in Norbulinga, in Tsokiyil Phodrang [Tib. mtsho dkyil pho brang] Palace, there was a meeting. In this meeting, only the Chinese leaders and the two Sitsab were present. The Dalai Lama was in his quarters. The subject of the conversation was that the Chinese were saying that they wanted to hoist a flag on top of the Potala Palace. They also wanted to place a flag on top of the Tibetan military headquarters, and require that the Tibetan soldiers wear Chinese uniforms. The Sitsab said that this could never happen. Then, whatever the subject of the talk, Lukhangwa said, "How can this be possible, it just cannot be. How can you put two flags on one house? What kind of a custom is that? How can two people sit on one chair? This is not possible and it will never be possible. If Chinese soldiers put up flags, the Tibetan soldiers will take them down. It will not be easy." After that, what the Chinese said was not known, but usually it was Lukhangwa who spoke most of the time. That day, the Sitsab lama was so furious that he banged his fists on the table and fought using the Chinese language. He was also shouting and said, "Meiyou guanxi, meiyou guanxi," which means, "It doesn't matter," and then said many other things in Chinese. After the meeting, when the two Sitsab were returning and riding together, they were speaking to each other. Lukhangwa said to the Sitsab lama, "Today, you, Kungö Lama, made them become lackluster [Tib. mog mog por btang]." The Sitsab lama said, "Yes, today quite something has happened. The way he spoke was so loathsome that I could not even wait for the interpreter to reply. When I was previously in China for a while, I knew a little Chinese, and so it came out and the fight began. When such things were being said, it took too long through the interpreter and so I just spoke." So the two were returning and talking and smiling.

Later, finally it was said that the two Sitsab had to be removed, and the Chinese approached the Dalai Lama and made that request. So one day the two of them were ordered to come before the Dalai Lama. While seated, he presented them with a blessed ribbon [Tib. phyag srung] and gifts. The Dalai Lama himself ordered their dismissal, which was forced by the Chinese. This is what I have heard about the two Sitsab and their encounter with the Chinese. This is what Trekhang Thubden Samjog [Tib. bkraś khang thub bstan bsam mchog] said, you know the younger Trekhang Khenjung, who was the nendrön at the time of the two Sitsab. So whatever the two did, Samjog knew everything. So when the Information Department [of the government in exile] invited them, Samjog was included too. When Samjola was asked about this, this was his reply. What I heard is based on the questions and answers given by Samjog. So it is not just something said casually.

Q: You are talking about the one living in the states?

A: No, he passed away.

Q: So it is not the Trekhang Khenjung in the States.

A: No, he is the older one. He is Changkyim Thubden Tsempel [Tib. thub bstan tshe 'phel]. This one is Ngöshi [Tib. dngos gzhi] Thubden Samjog, their estate was called Namkha [Tib. nam mka'] Ngöshi.

Q: So you are talking about Kungö Samjog.

A: Yes, Samjog.

Q: I see.

A: Later, Samjog and Namseling went to Lhoka.

Q: During this time, what was the perception of the Kashag among the officials and the people? Did they think that the Kashag was close to the Chinese? Was there some thinking like that?

A: Yes, the people, what to say, thought that unlike the two Sitsab, the Kashag was not being very hard and was weak [Tib. sla po] with the Chinese. Yes, the people saw it in that way. However, in reality it was never a situation where the Kashag was saving face [Tib. ngo srung] for the Chinese. They were in a situation where they had to do what they were doing. What to say, the two sides were totally unmatched in power. Since Tibet fell under the power of the Chinese, the Kashag had to do that much. But then it would not last and would get torn up again. If the Kashag was forceful like the two Sitsab, then after some time it would spell their end. So the Kashag had to do that much. People say that the Kashag was not acting like that, but if one was in the Kashag, then there was nothing to do but just that, that's for sure. So the people did not think that it was a situation where the Kashag was going along with the Chinese, but basically one where the people felt that they were not being hard [Tib. khregs po] enough. So this is the difference between seeing at a distance and meeting up close [Tib. bltas pa dang gtugs pa]. It is said that swimming in water is different from making the same motions on a carpet [Tib. 'bol gdan sgang girkyal]. So when it really comes for actions then, there is no other means, that's it.

Q: Later, what happened regarding the question of hoisting flags on the Potala and on the Tibetan Military Headquarters, the matter of the Military Administrative Committee, and changing to Chinese uniforms?

A: This happened. Regarding these things, at the Jensei Palace, the two Sitsab united to fight off the flag issue. It must have been right after this that there was the Chinese October 1st celebration [Ch. shi yi], which took place in view of the Potala at the end of the Tsidrun Lingka. A place was made for the Chinese celebrations from which one could see the Potala. Earlier, with these plans, the people's field [Tib. thang] was made for these celebrations. The October 1st celebration was about to take place and the Chinese told the two Sitsab that during the celebration they wanted to put a flag on the Potala and the Tibetan Military Headquarters, and they would take it down as soon as the celebrations were over. They were approaching the two Sitsab regarding this. However, their reply was that this could never be.

The Tibetan officials who were sent to help with the preparations for the celebration were Sawang Dombor, Magji Künsangtse, and Depön Tashi Bera. The two Sitsab sent a messenger asking Dombor to come to the Secretariat of the Dalai Lama, Tse ga. He returned saying that the Sitsab had said that the Chinese wanted to temporarily hoist flags on the Potala and the Tibetan Military Headquarters, and that this was not at all permissible. "Since you people are heading things [the celebration preparations], if the Chinese speak as if they have already spoken to us and try and trick you, let it be known that this is what we have said and that if you say something different later it will not be tolerated." This is what Sawang Dombor said when he came down. They said that since the two Sitsab had made it absolutely clear, the Chinese did not tell them that they wanted to hoist the flags. However, that's what the two Sitsab had ordered. So even though the two Sitsab had lost their posts, what they had spoken about was based on reason and on true historical facts. The truth, unless it was done away with through power, was something that words could not change, as one couldn't take the flag down and put up another. And though they lost their posts, until the government was totally destroyed in 1959, let alone putting flags on the Potala, they didn't even do this on the Tibetan Military Headquarters nor on the various military regimental headquarters, or during the military parades. It was all Tibetan flags and Tibetan uniforms. Also, the words spoken during the military parade were in Tibetan. So up until 1959, this continued. It was possible to stay on the same course charted out by the two Sitsab. If we were under the Chinese, then this would not be possible, right? Right from the beginning, since it was a very important political issue, an issue that was brought up right at the time of the meetings, they should have settled it right away, right? But they could not do anything based on the true situation. So until the Dalai Lama came to India, the military uniforms were Tibetan.

During the 13th Dalai Lama's time, it was decided that the Gusung Regiment should have a distinctive uniform. They looked at the uniforms of various other countries and decided that the English uniform and military drills were in accordance with the Dalai Lama's wishes. So the Gusung Regiment all wore English uniforms. At Norbulinga, during the opera festival Shodön, they had a march-past. The magji wore an English uniform and so did the other depön, rupön, and gyagpön. The rest of the troops, the Trapchi Regiment and others, wore Tibetan uniforms with their felt, Western style hats, a brown men's dress with a checked hem or collar, and long boots. That was the military dress. During Shodön, the standing salute and the command must be given by the magji himself. During this time, the senior magji was Ragashag, who was a Kalön as well as a magji. So Ragashag was standing and looking down, and giving the commands to the troops in English. Disregard the question of the Chinese not saying anything about giving commands in Tibetan and putting on a military pageant. Regarding the matter of Tibetan soldiers, and especially the Gusung Regiment, which were wearing English uniforms and taking English commands, the Chinese should have said something, since this was something that was just not permitted. The reason they could not say anything was that they had no right to say it. It stayed that way until 1959.

It was not a question of the Chinese not knowing about it, nor one where they were not present in Lhasa. In Lhasa, after the death of the 13th Dalai Lama, they said that they came to pay their respects, and that was how they came to stay at Kyitöpa and not return. So the Chinese were there, sending messages back to China. However, that was the way the military drills were done and that was the way the uniforms were worn. During ceremonies, the Chinese representatives were there. So were the Indian and the Nepalese, and the Bhutanese Locha [Tib. lo phyag] representative was there. So people from various countries were there. They came during all of the ceremonies. It [military parades, dress, command language] was something that was witnessed and done. Let alone the question of taking away the Tibetan military uniforms, they could not even take away the English uniforms. So what does that point to? It was because they did not have the right to say, "Get rid of it."

Q: Then even the money remained the same until 1959, didn't it? Was there any talk about wanting to change it?

A: I have not heard that they first discussed the money. However, without any discussion of it, it was something that had to be put into practice, wasn't it? There was not a single Chinese paper currency in the market. Everything was the white Chinese dayan. The dayan was not accepted on the basis of its stamp, only on the basis of the silver's weight at that time. When it was weighed, it was equivalent to the Tibetan currency of 15 ngüsang. It was settled on that basis. Ever since the Chinese came, for about the next 9 years in Lhasa, there was not one single piece of Chinese paper money in use in the market. Even though we had been suppressed through power, and even though they might have destroyed Tibetan currency, they could have introduced their own paper money very well alongside it. This was absolutely not permitted to happen. Since it is a "foreign country," we did not accept its printed paper as our currency; only the silver weight of the dayan. Printed paper currency was only accepted because of the official sanction of the government. That was why it was not accepted. There was not even one piece in the market. It's absolutely clear.

Q: Last time, I was able to ask Lhatsun Labrang [Tib. lha btsun bla brang] Chandzö about the People's Association of 1952 [Tib. chu 'brug]. I was not able to ask him, though I could ask him later, how widespread was it? Since representatives had to come from all over the place.

A: The way the People's Association had its connections, it was all the way from Tö to Purang [Tib. spu hreng], Ruthok [Tib. ru thog], and Ngari. They distributed their letters in all the districts.

Q: Distributed letters?

A: Yes, letters were distributed. Letters were accepted from all of the districts to come to the meetings and invitations from districts were extended to various people living in Lhasa, so replies came saying that our representative in Lhasa is such and such person whom we have instructed. So connections were made with all of the districts all over Tibet and the People's Association was well represented. If we take, for example, just Lhasa, there were a lot of workmen, like cobblers, tailors, and silver and copper smiths. And the lower caste people who take the beggars' corpses to the sky burial, the ragyaba. So for its size, there were many and numerous groups represented. All of the craft groups were there. There were also connections with all the monasteries, and in the households of Lhasa there were many manager types. Even in the monasteries there were Jayan Dawa [Tib. 'jam dbyangs zla ba], Tsa Trunyila [Tib. tsha ba drung yig lags], and others.

Q: And Thamjö Sonamla [Tib. dam chos bsod nams lags]?

A: Yes, Thamjö Sonam. Lhatsün Labrang Chandzö was one of the main people, too. Then up here [in McLeod Ganj], there was Chandzö Ngawang Temba [Tib. ngag dbang bstan pa].

Q: I didn't know that, where?

A: He is up in Dharamsala.

Q: Is he working somewhere?

A: Maybe in the Rangtsen Tsogchung [Tib. rang btsan tshogs chung] or something. He was in it. His teacher was Tsa Trunyila. Trunyila was one of the main people.

Q: If I wanted to ask him now, Ngawang Temba is alive, right?

A: Yes, he is there and Lhatsün Labrang Chandzö is there. These two were actually there and both did quite a lot of work in it. They have written about 6 points. Anyway, the Ütsang Association came out with something about it.

Q: Yes, there was.

A: They have written the 6 points [in the petition] in their magazine.

Q: Who wrote it in the Ütsang tsogpa magazine?

A: It was written by a TCV teacher. He is sort of from the same family as Chandzö Ngawang Temba. I think whatever Chandzö Ngawang Temba had to say is probably in the book. He and the writer are basically from the same family. In that they have written the 6 points of the petition. I didn't get any documents written by Alo Chöndze, Bumtang Trunyi [Tib. 'bum thang drung yig] and Bisu [Tib. spel zur].

Q: There is something written by Alo Chöndze, isn't there?

A: Yes, it might be in it. I haven't seen it.

Q: Alo Chöndze, is he alive or dead?

A: I doubt he is dead. I think he is abroad.

Q: Is he abroad?

A: Yes.

Q: Some were saying something to the effect that he is dead or something.

A: Yes, I heard something like that, but I don't know.

Q: When the Chinese came to Tibet, Tibet was overpowered by their superior numbers [Tib. mang sne nyung and the arrest of the people and their punishment, what kind of character were the Chinese showing?

A: They divided people into "upper class reactionaries [Tib. mtho rim log spyod]," and trerim, "bad class enemies," and made all the divisions. According to the Chinese, about 5 percent were the reactionaries and we were punishing them according to the proletariat dictatorship [Tib. srid dbang sger 'dzin pa]. The people would punish them, and so they were handed over to the people. Although the Chinese did the work, the people were coached into beating them. The people behaved as if they were against them and showed that they were going to punish the reactionaries. On the outside they made it look like the people who, up to now, had suffered so much that they were now taking revenge for their sufferings and were punishing the reactionaries. The Chinese made this tool and made them punish the reactionaries. So what was the actual situation? As I mentioned yesterday, when Ngabö said that he wanted to consult the nation or Gyekhab [Tib. rgyal khab], regarding the 17 Point-Agreement, they did not allow that. So one's wishes could not be fulfilled, and then there was no avoiding sealing the Agreement. Moreover, in the 17-Point Agreement there was something called the "local government of Tibet." To call the Tibetan government, the "local government of Tibet," there was never any precedent in any other previous document. That phrase was something unheard of before and a phrase that one had never seen before. Forget about the others, even in the Chinese documents this is never seen. So what the Chinese were saying was, "Our soldiers are at the border, so are you going to sign or not? If not, we will give marching orders to pull the trigger and go forward. So are you going to sign or not?" That is how they had to sign. They included such a phrase as the "local government of Tibet" and they did not even allow consultations. A treaty is something that both sides have agreed to and are satisfied with. Since one side was forced to sign without being satisfied, that was the reason the real seal was not used. From the very person who went to discuss the Agreement, from Ngabö's side, that's how he thought and that's what he showed in his disposition.

When the Chinese came up from China, from the people's side, forget about a happy reception, they rose up in the People's Association. One association rose up, and they were done away with. A second one rose up, and that was done away with too, and then the third one also rose up. Like an automatic machine they rose up. The two Sitsab were saying, "We have a lot of things to talk about and we will say them gradually, we will speak gradually." Talk about a happy reception, there was none when they went to discuss the Agreement. None from the Sitsab's side and the government did not accept it, and neither did the people. So the 17-Point Agreement, whatever is said about it, whatever is said to be included in it or not, this was the reality. The reason such a phrase was in it was that when we were totally unprepared, they said we could order the soldiers to pull the trigger and go straight forward. So what are you going to do? If we allowed them to go straight forward, then all the way to Ngari, it was unprotected land. There were no soldiers lined up, nothing. So for the time being, to stop them, the Agreement had to be signed. From the very beginning the Agreement was made, it was not a situation where the treaty was made through agreement.